Strategies for Developing an Institutional Program to Manage Compassion Fatigue

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Session Objectives

• What is Compassion Fatigue?
  – The Human-Animal Bond
• Examine compassion fatigue and its impact on our community
  – Animal Caregivers, Researchers, IACUC
• Provide example coping strategies
• Illustrate compassion fatigue program development
• Develop and implement a sustainable compassion fatigue program
What is Compassion Fatigue?

• Also known as secondary traumatic stress (STS), is a condition characterized by a gradual lessening of compassion (sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others) over time.

• It’s common among individuals that work directly with trauma victims.

• It was first diagnosed in nurses in the 1950’s.
Compassion Fatigue and Lab Animal Professionals (LAPs)?

• A combination of physical, emotional and psychological depletion associated with working and caring for animals and their well-being and ultimately having to euthanize them.
  
  – *It is the negative aspect of our work. It may be related to: providing care, working with colleagues, beliefs about self, system failure, burnout and/or any work-related trauma.*
Signs and Symptoms - Individual

- Depression
- Hopelessness
- Physical and emotional exhaustion
- Diminished sense of career enjoyment
- Bottled-up emotions
- Irritability
- Increases in mistakes
- Anxiety
- Problems in personal relationships
- Isolation
- Poor relationships w/co-workers
- Substance abuse
Signs and Symptoms - Organization

- Substandard level of care
- Absenteeism
- High turnover
- Lack of teamwork
- Team conflict
- Low morale

- Blaming and complaining
- Reputation at risk
- Poor quality control
- Deterioration of the organization’s mission
- Increased cynicism
The Cost of Caring

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet”

~ Remen, 1996
• The human-animal bond exists in many forms and it can improve both human and animal welfare

• Close contact with animals can create feelings of satisfaction and affection

“Every technician I interviewed for this study experienced some form of attachment to a laboratory animal at least once in his or her career.” ~Arnold Arluke
We all Experience it

Not only do the individuals that work directly with the animals, but IACUC members, administrative support staff, vendors and facilities services personnel may indirectly experience compassion fatigue.

We don’t get compassion fatigue because we are weak, can’t handle the work, aren’t “cut out” for it, etc. We get compassion fatigue because we care, deeply. And we ignore our own needs.
In the mid-1990’s

• When I started to work in the field of laboratory animal science, I was overwhelmed by emotions.

• Nobody told me about the feelings of
  ➢ Guilt...
  ➢ Sadness...
  ➢ Regrets...

And nobody told me (or warned me) how difficult it would be to talk about my work/research
Employee Hazard Training

- Bites, scratches, kicks, physical trauma
- Ergonomics, noise
- Zoonoses, allergens, blood-borne pathogens
- Caustic, infectious, radioactive, toxic agents
- Sharps, hot surfaces, physical hazards
- Public safety, facility and computer security
- Disaster plans, fire, flood, bomb threat
- Harassment, discrimination, whistleblower
- Emotional involvement?
It is important

To provide Lab Animal Professionals with proper guidance and care because this will also have an effect on the animals.
Compassion Fatigue: Animal Caregivers & Vets/Techs

- Long hours
- Manual labor
- Hazardous conditions
- Isolation
- Euthanasia
- Observed morbidity and mortality
- May develop animal allergies
- Desensitization
- Sadness over the loss of a particular animal
- Hard to talk about work

Outcomes

- No one is going to listen/care
- Nothing will be done
- Low morale
- Poor attendance
- High job turnover
- Poor job performance
- Callous or uncaring attitude
- Nothing to show for it
Compassion Fatigue: Research Faculty & Staff

- Long hours
- Regularly witness or induce disease in animals
- Euthanasia
- Self-blame
- Isolation
- No one to talk to
- May develop animal allergies
- Targeted by animal rights activists

- Can’t talk about work
Compassion Fatigue: IACUC Members & Administrative Staff

• Protocol Reviews
  o Species specific studies / category E protocols

• Protocol/Grant Congruency Reviews
  o Projects / pilot studies without approval

• Post-Approval Monitoring
  o Protocol drift

• Animal Numbers
  o UW ~686,877 animals/yr

• Program Size / Complexity
  o UW 484 Protocols
  o UW 337 Principal Investigators
  o >45 different species

continued~

• System Failure
• Ethical Decisions
• UW Kills

Outcomes

• Unexpected Outcomes
• Negative Media / Animal Rights Activists
• Desensitization

• Can’t talk about work!
Why we need to cope?

• Beyond knowledge and skill, empathetic and caring personnel provide humane and respectful care
• Allowing appropriate outlets for expression can reinforce the integrity of the human-animal bond
• Compassionate animal care is a foundation of good science
Sharing UW’s Experience: How did we get here?

• Identify the Need
• Assess the Potential Demand
• Anneke Keizer, Founder, COPE+
  ➢ Small company specializing in counseling services for people working with laboratory animals
• Needs Assessment (July 2016 & June 2017)
  ➢ Interviews, one-on-one interactions, focus groups
Defining Moment

Stop thinking too much, it’s alright not to know the answers. They will come to you when you least expect it.
Dare 2 Care (D2C) Compassion Fatigue Committee
Developing a Compassion Fatigue Program

Management

Those who say it cannot be done shouldn’t interrupt the people doing it.
D2C Program Mission Statement

Assist all members of the research team to recognize compassion fatigue and raise awareness, provide tools, strategies and resources for managing human emotions in working with and caring for laboratory animals.
Compassion Fatigue at UW

Implemented

Heart Stickers & Tags
Need More Communication
Study Endpoint Notification

Animal Euthanasia
Self care / Coping Strategies
Break Rooms
Comment Boxes

Compassion Fatigue
Time/Space for Reflection

Dedicated Area
Support for Staff
Someone to Talk To

Peer Counselor
Resources
Annual UW D2C Class:
- LAPs
- Leadership

UW Care Link/Work in progress

Implemented

Evaluating
Break Rooms

Implemented

Need to say goodbye

Commemorations

Implemented

Drab Environments

Implemented

Window Project

Implemented

Windowless Environments

Tabled

Tabled

Tabled

Work in progress

Implemented
Implementation: Initial Program Target Objectives

- Study Endpoint Notification
- Support for Staff
- Annual Commemoration
- Dedication Area
Study Endpoint Notification

• Heart Stickers
  ➢ DCM (temporarily being used with NHPs)

• WaNPRC subcommittee created

• Cage Tags
  ➢ Work in progress

• Email Notification (NHPs)
  ➢ Email Templates
    o Endpoint information
    o Acknowledge high levels of humane care
    o Acknowledge the greater purpose the animal served
Support for Staff

• When individuals experience grief, anxiety, or bereavement associated with animal loss, it’s important that we:
  - Acknowledge that these feelings exist
  - Provide support in the workplace

• Addressing this in a safe and supportive environment allows individuals to:
  - Feel validated
  - Strengthen coping mechanisms
  - Reinforce ability to sustain or form new bonds
Support for Staff ~ continued

• Create open atmosphere
  ➢ Encourages staff to acknowledge feelings
  ➢ Free from the shame or embarrassment of emotional reactions

• Institute a safe open-door policy

• Provide a pleasant work environment

• Supply a comfortable break area for resting and reflecting

• Offer educational opportunities that address humane animal care and use, animal welfare and ethics
Annual Commemoration / Dedication Area

University of Rochester School of Medicine
Bronze casting, in place since the 1920’s

Merck Research Laboratories

In tribute to research animals whose contributions have saved millions of human and animal lives and reduced suffering worldwide.
From the animal technicians, supervisors, managers, veterinarians and research scientists who care for research animals.

Korean FDA, Seoul
Pagoda, site of annual ceremony

ILAR Journal V43(1) 2002, Iliff An Additional "R": Remembering the Animals
TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND REMEMBER ALL THE ANIMALS THAT HAVE BEEN USED IN OUR RESEARCH FACILITY, FOR THEY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF SCIENCE AND ENABLED MEDICAL ADVANCEMENT.

AND TO ACKNOWLEDGE ALL RESEARCH PERSONNEL WHO HUMANELY CARE AND USE ANIMALS; YOUR DEDICATION TO ANIMAL WELFARE AND TO SCIENCE IS ADMIRABLE.

Hospital for Special Surgery, Manhattan
Annual Commemoration / Dedication Area
Next D2C Program Related Objectives

• Self Care Strategies
• Reflections
• Work Environments
• The “Box” Project
• Art of Compassion
• Sympathy Cards
Self Care Strategies

Rita & Zombie, Kayaking
Christina, volunteering
One Health in Malaysia
Yuki, hiking to Camp Muir
Sara & Amber, at dog agility class
Non-negotiables of Self Care

Eat Well

Rest

Exercise and Fresh Air

Connect with others
Time and Place for Reflection

• Purpose - provide an opportunity for individuals to come together in one place to pay tribute to our research animals and each other.

• Paul and Casey shared their stories and provided an explanation about how the use of their research animals help bring new treatment to patients with Myotubular Myopathy (MTM), a form of muscular dystrophy.

• Open to all animal caregivers, research faculty and staff
Work Environment / Break Areas
The “Box” Project

• Poetry
• Letters
• Farewell Notes
• Drawings*

* All drawings courtesy/copyright of our very own Emily Spaulding, Research Scientist/Engineer 1
Department of Comparative Medicine - Veterinary Services
The “Box” Project
He is always happy and always rolls onto his side to have his belly rubbed... He always cheers me up if I’m having a bad day.
“When I first got the study, Bert was the only one that truly stood out. He was the only monkey who would interact with anyone in the room by touching our gloves and taking prima treats out of our hands. He was the sweetest monkey in the cage, but as soon as he was pulled out he made sure everyone knew he was the boss. So naturally, we would all cling to him because he showed his personality right away. Isaac, on the other hand, was extremely submissive and timid to any human interaction. At the transfer, Isaac was placed with an aggressive, dominant mate who took advantage of him. They were eventually separated from each other with hopes of Isaac finding a friendlier mate at the random. As the study went from source to target, Bert and Isaac were paired together. Luckily, Bert took Isaac by the hand and showed him that human interaction isn’t so bad. Isaac slowly progressed and began to touch gloves, gowns, and take treats. Of course, Bert advanced quickly from gloves and treats to gowns, face shields, and getting very excited to see any human. He has a tendency to grab the bottom of the cage with all fours and shake like a mad man when he is not getting any attention. Isaac would get on all fours and tilt his head down and just stare at you with his big eyes surrounded by his very large eyebrow. From their first day together, the two became best buds and would be lost without each other. Its unfortunate that my study is coming to an end, but Bert and Isaac will stay near and dear to our hearts.”
Sustainability: Compassion Fatigue Program
Future Directions

• New Employee Orientations (HR)
• OH Screening
  ➢ E.g., Annual Lab Animal Questionnaire – CF Section
• Incorporate CF training into required job training
• Develop/Implement a UW CF Curriculum/Class for LAPs and Management
• D2C.org?
D2C Toolkit

- Own It (management/exec leadership supports but stays out of way)
- Expect challenges
- In-Person Interviews
  - Needs Assessment
  - Challenges
- Form Compassion Fatigue Committee (CFC)
  - Identify immediate goals/objectives
  - Prioritize goals/objectives that are important and easily accomplished

- Mission Statement
- Establish Baseline
  - All user survey - Research Faculty/Staff, ATs, IACUC, Admin
- Human Subjects Protocol?
- Funding Opportunities/Sponsorships

- Monthly D2C:CFC Meetings
- Time for Reflection - Quarterly Basis/As Needed
- Challenges

- Survey - Annually
- Establish “Baseline” (metrics)
- Identify what is and what isn’t working and make necessary changes

If you need help, reach out to us!
Remember.....

• Empathetic, caring personnel ensure that animals are treated humanely and with respect.
• Emotionally supported individuals who are caring and respectful toward animals are best suited to promote and provide an enriching experience for animals.
• It’s better to have a Dare2Care Compassion Fatigue Program and not need it than to need one and not have it!
Acknowledgments

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University of Washington D2C Compassion Fatigue Committee

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Ken Gordon, Executive Director, NWABR
Thank you for what you do today, tomorrow, next week, next year..... you truly make a difference!